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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in Ethiopia begins with an overview of the role of English in the society in general, and goes on to outline the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (elementary, secondary, higher, and teacher), the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English outside the educational system, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, creative writing, language research, and other sources of information. It is concluded that despite the revolutionary government's intention to make Amharic the language of instruction in all secondary and postsecondary institutions, the government is convinced of the importance of English instruction in the educational system, and officials have made it clear that they would welcome the return of British-born advisers and teachers to many Ethiopian institutions. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Ethiopia

Date: JULY 1986

Ethiopia's fourteen regions had an estimated population of 42 million in 1985, of which roughly one-half was aged nineteen or below. Its economy is based on agriculture, and its economic fortunes tend to follow the fluctuations of the coffee market.

The language situation is complex. There are three families of languages, Semitic, Cushitic and Nilotic, comprising some thirty-five distinct languages, as well as various dialects which, if counted as languages, bring the number to around eighty.

1 ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

The history of English language teaching in Ethiopian schools dates back to the time when modern education was introduced into the country in the first quarter of the twentieth century: from the start, English played a significant role in the education system of the country, and was taught in schools (with French and Italian) up to the short-lived Italian occupation of Ethiopia. After the defeat of the Italians, English became the medium of instruction at all levels of education and, in 1941, acquired its position as the second official language next to Amharic, the national language.

Today English is taught as a school subject from grade 3 of the elementary level, and becomes the medium of instruction from grade 7, the first year of the junior secondary level. In theory, it remains the medium of instruction in all educational institutions thereafter: in fact, because of the language limitations of many teachers in secondary schools, a good deal of instruction takes place in a mixture of English and Amharic.

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English is a compulsory subject in the national examinations conducted at the end of grades 6, 8 and 12. The latter examination, also known as the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination, provides the basis on which students are selected for tertiary-level institutions. A grade C pass in English is the minimum necessary for entry into university: some university departments demand a pass in English at grade B. All first-year university students have to take the freshmen's English course, much of it of a remedial nature to make up for the shortcomings of English teaching in secondary schools. Students who fail the freshmen's course have to repeat it until they pass or they are not allowed to graduate.

2 ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In 1963 the Ministry of Education made a new policy decision regarding the language of instruction. According to the new policy, Amharic became the medium of instruction in elementary schools (grades 1-6) and English was retained as a medium of instruction in the secondary and higher institutions (grades 7 onwards). It was also decided that English should be taught from grade 3 onwards. This regulation is in effect in all Government schools to date.

Many formerly private, now nationalized schools, have maintained their former policy of teaching English.

3 TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

In the past, when English was used as a medium of instruction from grade 1 on, more time was allocated in the curriculum to teaching English, and teachers at all grades were expatriates.

Gradually however, more Ethiopians have been trained, and they have now altogether replaced the expatriate teachers in the primary and, more recently, the secondary schools. At the time of visiting (1986), the senior secondary schools were almost entirely staffed by Ethiopians, except for a very few Indian teachers.

There are no American or British teachers of English in government elementary or secondary schools in Ethiopia. Private schools like the English Community School (Sandford), St Joseph's, The International (formerly American) Community School and the Indian Community School employ a small number of British and/or American teachers.

Several British (and/or American) teachers teach English in the institutions of higher education; but even there, the great majority of teachers are Ethiopians.

Training and qualification of English Teachers

Elementary — Officially the elementary school English teachers are expected to be graduates of the teacher-training institutes: these used to train teachers for two years but now the training programme lasts only one year. The acute shortage of trained elementary school teachers has led to the appointment of untrained teachers to teach English.

Even those who have been to the teacher training institutes for a year or more, and have trained for teaching, cannot be considered qualified English teachers because of their poor background in English. Their competence and proficiency in using the language is nowhere near the professional standard required for second language teaching.

Junior secondary — The regulations of the Ministry of Education state that junior secondary school teachers should be graduates of the Junior College of Teacher Education (CTE). They are required to have undergone two years of training after completing secondary education. But in most cases it is elementary school teachers who are employed as English teachers in the junior secondary schools. Some of them receive summer in-service training at Addis Ababa University (AAU) Faculty of Education.

Senior secondary — It is again a regulation of the Ministry of Education that teachers in senior secondary schools have an MA or BA degree, and most English teachers in senior secondary schools are graduates of AAU and Asmara University. There are also, at this level, some Indian nationals teaching English. However, a number of graduates of the Junior College of Teacher Education, who are trained for junior secondary schools, are teaching in senior secondary schools, because of the shortage of qualified English teachers.

Teacher training — Currently there are ten teacher-training institutes for the training of primary school teachers. The instructors at these institutes are mostly graduates of the Bahr Dar Academy of Pedagogy, but they include also a few graduates of AAU. There are also East Germans, Cubans and Russians teaching various methodology courses as well as political education. There are no native speakers to teach English at this level.

Universities and colleges — Most of the teaching staff of AAU is composed of Ethiopians. There are very few British or Indians teaching English at this level. Here the emphasis is on postgraduate work.

4 MATERIALS SUPPORT

There is no special materials support for the teaching of English in the Ethiopian school system apart from student textbooks, produced locally on a regular basis, and the teachers' guides. Not even these are available to some schools in remote parts of the country. However, in response to the importance of and need for various forms of materials support for the teaching of English, the English Panel of the Curriculum Department of the Ministry of Education has started work on the production of supplementary reading materials.

The British Council has put some money into this project, to encourage the production of such materials locally. During the 1985/6 academic year, the British Council donated 1,500 Birr to this purpose.

In addition, the Department of Educational Mass Media runs 'English by Radio' programmes, which are designed to reinforce or supplement English language teaching in schools.

The Sandford English Community School is the only private school with native speakers teaching English. It has received books from the British Council via the Book Resale Scheme, which was started on a pilot basis in September 1985.

The Sandford English Community School runs evening classes which serve Ethiopian and a few other students of various nationalities (Chinese, Bulgarian, etc) total number 275, arranged in eleven classes at four levels, beginners, pre-intermediate, intermediate, advanced. There are waiting lists for admission and there is scope here for expansion.

Books used are: Streamline English Series:
Departures; Connections; Destinations. (Oxford University Press)

Progress Towards First Certificate (Cambridge University Press).

Cambridge First Certificate Exam Practice (Cambridge University Press)

Textbooks are sold to students at cost price.

Cassettes for Streamline English are in use also.

Teachers are two full-time graduate expatriates recruited in UK, and part-timers as needed to cover sickness, absences, etc (all expatriate British). To the best of our knowledge at this time, the teachers do not have ELT qualifications.

5 EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Ethiopia follows a highly centralized system of education, a system in which curricula are planned centrally and implemented throughout the country in a uniform manner. The same textbooks, teachers' guides, etc, that are prescribed for particular grades are used all over the country.

General directives regarding the overall educational administration are issued by the Ministry of Education. The various departments of the Ministry are charged with particular duties and responsibilities relevant to the realization of the general objectives of education within the country: the Curriculum Department prepares the general objectives of education, the curricula and the necessary instructional materials. (See chart p9).

6 DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

English curriculum, student textbooks, teachers' guides and supplementary readers for the elementary and secondary schools are prepared in a socialist context and contain a marked ideological load.

'English has remained the medium of instruction in secondary and higher education for over forty years, and is still taught as a subject in primary schools from the third year. Ideas that the medium of instruction should be

Amharic, or a mix of local languages, have been firmly resisted by the educational authorities. Both the Minister of Education and his Permanent Secretary were certain that such ideas would continue to be rejected.

English is also the language of business and international communication in Ethiopia, and is widely seen as necessary for technological development and a requirement for all skilled manpower.' (Extract from a report by Beryl Steele, ODA Education Adviser, 1984)

7 ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

By contrast with Amharic, English has little social function in the day-to-day lives of people in Ethiopia. Where the English language does play a vital role is in the introduction of science and technology into the country: libraries in the country are all stocked with books written in English. In addition, English has an important role in Ethiopia's external relations and, therefore, in her own development.

Many international organizations are represented in Ethiopia, including the OAU (Organization of African Unity), ECA (Economic Commission for Africa), EEC (European Economic Community), etc: these organizations use English for their day-to-day work. Banks, insurance companies, hospitals, airlines, etc., use English in their management and training activities.

English programmes are transmitted on Ethiopian radio and television. There is a daily newspaper in English, The Ethiopian Herald, and various magazines and bulletins are widely distributed.

8 BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

British support for English language teaching had been halted for some years when it was reinstated after Mr Rifkind's visit to Ethiopia of July 1984 and the establishment of a Technical Co-operation programme. Under the TC programme, Ethiopia was offered ELT instructors trained in the UK. This has been put into practice since 1985/86 with fifteen awards available for ELT/Applied Linguistics in 1986/87. In order to help improve the standard of English language teaching in Ethiopia, four ELT specialists are now to be provided, under the KELT scheme, to the Ministry of Education Commission for Higher Education and Addis Ababa University.

In addition, ELT books and equipment are supplied under the Book Presentation Programme (BPP).

9 AMERICAN SUPPORT

There is no officially-recognized American support for or contact with the Ministry of Education.

10 OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

There is no agency in Ethiopia supporting English teaching.

11 COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

English is favoured by many Ethiopians. Due to the role it plays in the educational system many parents want their children to have a good command of the language, but owing to the unfavourable conditions in which English is taught it follows that most students find it impossible to achieve adequate mastery of the language. Any opportunity for learning English is eagerly taken up and simplified English books are in great demand.

12 CREATIVE WRITING

There is not much significant creative writing in English undertaken by Ethiopians. However, a few works of fiction, such as The Afersata and The Thirteenth Sun, have appeared in the African Writers Series, published by Heinemann.

13 CURRENT RESEARCH

The Institute of Language Studies (ILS), Department of Foreign Languages, whose main objective is to improve the speech, writing and reading of university students, does a lot of research to produce relevant teaching materials and improve methods of teaching.

The ILS, in its effort to maintain standards of teaching English, has close contacts with the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and other senior institutions in the UK. This includes provision of external examiners by SOAS to ILS and the sending of Senior Fellows from ILS to SOAS.

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15 GENERAL STATEMENT

Despite the revolutionary government's intention to make Amharic the language of instruction in all secondary and tertiary institutions in the long run (see John Stoddart of English Language Service Department's report, The Use and Study of English in Ethiopian Schools) the government is now convinced about the importance of English teaching in the educational system, and officials make it plain that they would welcome the return of British-born advisers and teachers to many institutions in this country.

ETHIOPIA

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (CENTRAL)